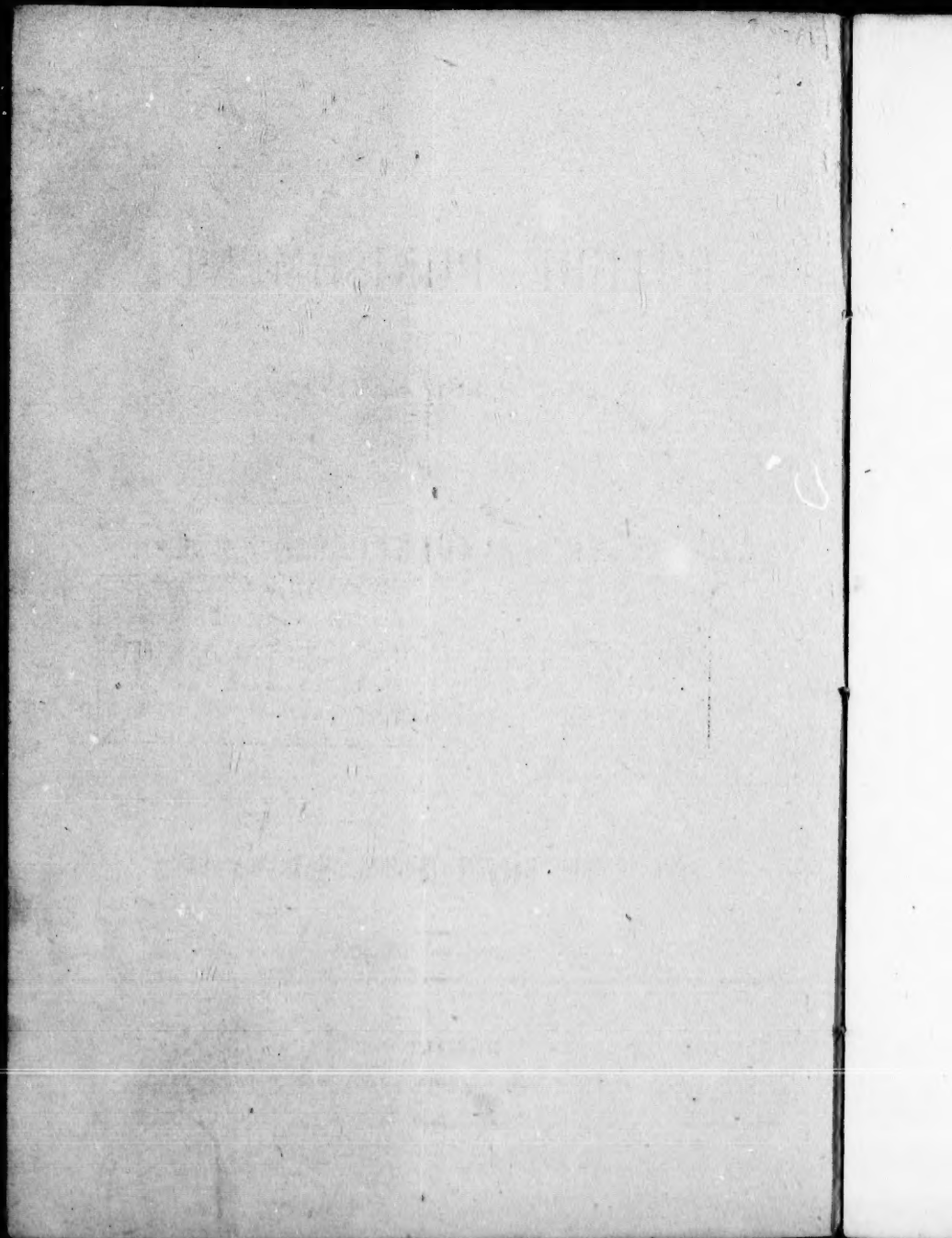


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FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

William Stewart.



FUTURE PUNISHMENT:

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED

ON

SABBATH, JANUARY 16th 1876,

BY THE

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FUTURE PUNISHMENT.

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment—."
Matt. xxv. 46.

THE subject which is now to engage our attention is a very solemn one. It is one, on which, were a minister of the Gospel to consult simply his own feelings, he would seldom preach at all. But if he wishes to say, like Paul, "I am free from the blood of all men," he must also be able to affirm with the same great apostle, "I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God." Of course our appeal on this, as on every other theme connected with revealed religion, must be "to the law and the testimony." If men speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. Merely human speculation as to what it is right and proper for God to do with the impenitent hereafter, must never be heeded for a single moment. It is the supremacy of God's word, not the supremacy of men's devices and desires, which must ever be recognized. To calm and careful reasoning from Holy Scripture we are bound to give the deepest attention: to everything else we are at liberty to demur. Our business in this inquiry concerning future punishment is only with "what is written in the Scripture of truth." We are shut up to one question, and only one: What saith the Lord? It is the duty of every man to whom the Word of God comes, to ascertain the truth which it teaches, and to maintain that truth at all hazard. Indeed, the Book itself requires us to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good;" while its own testimony concerning every one of its statements is this, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

Let me invite you then, dear hearers, to examine with all candor and reverence the solemn declarations of sacred Scripture regarding the future state of the impenitent. My own aim will be to present the truth in its plain and simple teachings, and with such feelings of tenderness as the awful subject demands; and my prayer for others is, that the discussion may awaken in their breasts neither resentment against God, nor resistance to his testimony, but a true repentance unto life, and a timely fleeing from the wrath to come.

You are aware that two different theories are advanced by those who deny the doctrine of "everlasting punishment," as held by evangelical Christians. The one theory is that of the restorationists, who maintain that after certain sufferings hereafter, the wicked are in some unexplained way to be restored to the favor and enjoyment of God in heaven. This is the view which is creating some little stir in Great Britain at the present day, and which is advanced by certain semi-philosophical and semi-poetical dreamers, with whom the wish is father to the thought, that somehow

"Good will be the final goal of ill."

The other theory is that of the destructionists, who also allow that there will be certain sufferings hereafter; but as the result of these, the wicked will be annihilated, or blotted out of being. Both of these theories we regard as utterly unscriptural, and we hope to prove them so; although our present examination will be chiefly confined to the latter of the two. Proceeding then to a careful induction of Scripture testimony, we regard the Bible as teaching

I.—THAT THE FUTURE STATE OF THE UNSAVED WILL BE ONE OF MISERY AND SUFFERING. In our text, it is called "punishment" by the Faithful and True Witness. "These shall go away into everlasting *punishment*." Now the Greek word (*kolasin**) here translated "punishment," is found in the original in only one other passage in the New Testament, (1 John iv. 18,) and is there rendered "torment:" "Fear

* The cognate verb is also found in two passages in the original, Acts iv. 21, 2 Peter ii. 9, in both of which an English reader will readily gather that its meaning is, *to chastise, to punish*.

hath torment;" that is, dread of God brings conscious, painful suffering to every mind that experiences it. Accordingly, since the word is translated "torment" in the one passage, and can have no other meaning, it might with equal propriety and force have been translated "torment" in our text. Indeed, that this is the only correct meaning of the word may be further seen from the 41st verse of this chapter from which the text is taken, where we learn that the "everlasting punishment" into which the unsaved go away is "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Surely that is torment; that is the very place where according to the 20th chapter of Revelation, they "shall be *tormented* day and night forever and ever." So that if the words of the Bible are to be taken in their plain and natural sense, it seems clear that the future state of the impenitent is to be one of pain and suffering, of wretchedness and misery. In the Epistle to the Romans (chap. ii. 8, 9) we read that "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," will be the portion of "every soul of man that doeth evil." Would any one be bold enough to deny that "indignation and wrath" necessarily involve the idea of conscious misery? Think, moreover, of the words of Jesus, recorded no fewer than seven times in the Gospels: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;" "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Could language be found to prove more conclusively that the sufferings of the lost are to be intense in their character? Add to all this mass of Scripture testimony, the representations which are found scattered throughout the New Testament of a "lake of fire," "a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," a place "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" and it must appear to any one not warped by prejudice, that whatever these physical representations may mean, they plainly teach that the sufferings of the unsaved will be at once conscious and severe.

That there will be degrees of punishment hereafter just as there are degrees of guilt here, is readily admitted. Stripes, few or many, according to desert, is what the Saviour teaches (Luke xii. 47). The same measure of punishment will not be meted out to all. From Luke x. 13, and Matt. x. 15, we learn that it will be "more tolerable" for some than for others in the day of judgment. The sentences may probably

range from little else than the blank negation of blessedness on to the uttermost intensity of woe. In proportion to privileges, and opportunities, and advantages, will be the awarded punishment. Those who had for guidance the law written on the human heart, and nothing more, will be held answerable for nothing more; while those who have had in addition the law written in the Holy Scripture, will be judged according to Holy Scripture. If, like the inhabitants of Sidon, men have seen only the ordinary works of God, for ordinary privileges will they be held responsible; but if, like the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida, they have witnessed marvels of grace and miracles of mercy, for extraordinary privileges they will be held responsible. In every individual case there will either be mitigation or aggravation: the aggravation according to what a man hath; the mitigation according to what he hath not. Plain and palpable will be the proof that there is no unrighteousness with God, and that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

This, then, is our first position, that the sacred writers invariably speak of future punishment in terms which suggest the idea of suffering, or pain, or misery. Did time permit, I might refer to other expressions employed, such as "woe," "wrath to come," "shame and everlasting contempt." Whatever may be the language used, whatever may be the representation given, future punishment is always something that may be *felt*. The whole tenor of the teaching is inconsistent with the notion of annihilation. In short, we are driven to adopt one or other of two alternatives:—either the words of the Bible descriptive of the future state of the ungodly are to be understood in their plain and common acceptation, or else the Book sorely deceives, when it threatens the impenitent with a doom of which they will never be conscious. Which of these alternatives shall we accept? Need I ask the question? Must not every sincere inquirer say: "Let God be true, but every man" speaking in opposition to him, "a liar." And oh! dear friends, whoever rebels, be you obedient to the truth. Whoever ignores or questions, whoever cavils at, or explains away the testimony of Jesus Christ, be you ever found in diligent and devout attention at his feet.

But the Bible teaches

II.—THAT THE FUTURE STATE OF THE UNSAVED WILL BE ONE OF ENDLESS MISERY AND SUFFERING. In our text, two different words are employed to teach the duration of the two different destinies. "These shall go away into *everlasting* punishment, but the righteous into life *eternal*." "Everlasting" and "Eternal" are the two words in our English New Testament; but in the original Greek the two clauses have one and the self-same word. In both members of the text it is found in the same form, and with precisely the same accompaniments. This verse alone, therefore, ought to put the question beyond the range of fair discussion. If the wicked may look forward to a close of their "everlasting" misery, then the righteous, on the same principle, may expect the close of their "eternal" life. As it will be with the one in duration, so will it be with the other. Indeed, I hesitate not to affirm, that not one single instance can be found in the Greek New Testament, where the word (*aionios*) expresses any other idea than that of endless duration. It occurs no fewer than seventy-one times in the original, and a careful collocation of all the passages will show that it is used forty-two times of the life which God gives through Jesus Christ; fourteen times of salvation and its issue; three times of duration as measured by the ages of a past eternity, twice of Jesus Christ as the "Eternal Life;" once of the "Everlasting God;" once of the "Eternal Spirit;" and once of the "power everlasting" ascribed to the blessed and only Potentate. There remain seven other solemn passages in which the word is used of future woe:—twice (Matt. xviii. 8: xxv. 41), of "everlasting fire," as the portion of the wicked, both angels and men; once, in our text, of "everlasting punishment;" once (2 Thess. i. 9), of "everlasting destruction;" once (Heb. vi. 2), of "eternal judgment;" once (Mark iii. 29), of "eternal damnation;" and once (Jude 7), of that "vengeance of eternal fire," which fell on the doomed inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Is not the conclusion irresistible that the future felicity of the righteous and the future misery of the wicked are alike and absolutely endless? When we read in the New Testament that the "life," and the "habitations," and the "glory," and the "inheritance" and the "kingdom," and the "salvation,"

of God's children are all represented as "everlasting," we never for a moment dream that the happiness of heaven will be insecure, that the laurel will ever be withered or the harp unstrung in that better land. And if the very same term, (a word which is confessedly the strongest afforded by the Greek language,) is employed to indicate the condition of the unsaved after the resurrection and the judgment, on what principle of either sound interpretation or common sense, can we conclude that there will be any change of their state or limit to their punishment? I take it that the teaching of our text alone requires me to warn men to "flee from the wrath to come," on the ground that the threatened wrath will be both intense in its character and endless in its duration.

But we do not build our belief on merely one isolated passage of God's word. To the same conclusion the repeated testimony of Scripture invariably leads. Is the condition of the lost hereafter represented as "darkness," a figure which is always employed in the Bible to indicate a condition of ignorance and wickedness, and wretchedness? Then that "darkness" is both dense and unrelieved,—it is the "blackness of darkness forever." (Jude 13.) Does coming woe like a "worm" prey upon the very vitals of their being? Then three times over, (Mark ix. 44, 46, 48,) the loving Saviour tells us that "their worm dieth not." Is the punishment of the impenitent symbolized by "fire"? Then it is set forth in the Scripture as at once "eternal" (Jude 7,) and "unquenchable," (Matt. iii. 12.) Is the awful abode of the lost described as a "lake of fire and brimstone," where the devil and deceivers have their portion? Then we are taught (Rev. xx. 10,) that there they "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." Is the future doom of the lost designated as "destruction" or ruin? Then it is an "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." (2 Thess. i. 9.) Is the constant employment of the living creatures round about God's throne in heaven set forth by the phrase, (Rev. iv. 8,) "they rest not day and night?" Then by the same phrase, and in precisely the same words in the original Greek, (Rev. xiv. 11,) is the severe and ceaseless torment of the unsaved described. Do we read, (Mark iii. 29,) that he that shall blaspheme against

the Holy Ghost "is in danger of eternal damnation?" Then it is affirmed, (Matt. xii. 31, 32,) that this same sinner shall not be forgiven, "neither in this world nor in the world to come." Is the phrase that teaches the eternity of God's glory, and the endlessness of Christ's throne, and the perpetuity of the saints' reign, confessedly the strongest employed in Scripture to designate duration? Then by the same phrase, "for ever and ever,"* is the endlessness of future torment represented. Surely every one must see that language so strong, and forms of expression so unvarying in their meaning *would* not, and *could* not have been used in a revelation from God, unless the doom of the wicked is to be one of endless misery.

One or two other passages may be referred to which set the doctrine, if possible, in yet stronger light. In Mark xiv. 21 our Lord pronounces a "woe" upon Judas, and adds: "good were it for that man if he had never been born." Would not these words be meaningless, if they did not teach that to the "woe" or punishment of the betrayer, there can come no ultimate relief. Suppose suffering as severe as you will, but admit that there is a point somewhere in the distant future, where it is to terminate, then as there would still be an eternity beyond that free from suffering, it could not be said of any individual, that it would be good for him if he had never been born. If Judas is to be blotted out of existence, it would then be the same with him as if he never had been born. But the thing is beyond a doubt: Judas will never cease to suffer; for the Saviour's solemn saying continues uncanceled, "good were it for that man if he had never been born."

From another point of view also, we may look at the question for a single moment. The ungodly man goes away into everlasting punishment. He enters into that state, that

* It has been well said that if the Greek phrase, *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, does not convey the idea of eternity then "it would not have been possible to express that idea in human language." It is found in twenty passages in the New Testament, in not one of which has it ever a limited meaning. The translation "until the ages of the ages" is so absurd and meaningless that the merest tyro in Greek would blush to advocate it. It is "unto," "for," or "during the ages of the ages." See Liddell and Scott on both *eis* and *aion*.

prison-house of the lost, an unrepentant, unforgiven sinner, and he sins all the time he continues there. If, to use the Saviour's language, in one of his parables in the 18th chapter of Matthew, he owed ten thousand talents when his punishment began, will not the debt be ever increasing? The culprit cannot pay that debt; Christ will not pay it; and if the debtor is to be put out of existence, it will never be paid at all. How absurd the conclusion! And how utterly opposed to what the Saviour himself teaches, (Matt. v. 26,) that no one shall depart from that prison till he "has paid the uttermost farthing?" Could language teach more plainly, that he is liable to a penalty which he can never fully pay, and handed over to a doom which will never come to an end? Indeed, the whole testimony of Scripture on the eternity of future punishment corresponds, and coheres, and culminates. It gathers together into a mass of evidence, and weight of proof, which leaving nothing to be desired, is perfectly irresistible.

We might finish our discourse at this point, convinced as we are that we have taught, and established, and vindicated the truth of God on this solemn subject. But there remain certain specious and sophistical objections, which, because they have led away the unstable and unwary, seem to call for some consideration. The inquiry may be made, Does not the preacher know something on the other side of the question? Are there not certain passages in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, which modify or explain the passages already quoted and examined? My answer is, as seeing Him who is invisible, I do not know a single verse, which, fairly interpreted, teaches anything contrary to these plain declarations. I cannot find within the boards of the Bible, a passage which proves that the punishment of the lost will be temporary. We may be referred to verses, where we read that the ungodly are to die, to perish, to be cut off, to lose life, to be consumed, to be destroyed, to be burned up, to be as though they had not been, to be blotted out of a book, and so on. My reply is that many of these passages refer to earthly judgments, and not to the final state of the impenitent dead. They are wrested from their connection, and made to teach what the Holy Spirit never intended that they should teach. It is somewhat remarkable

that the majority of them are found in the Old Testament. Why should men ignore or overlook the plain teachings of the New Testament, and grope for light about the future in the midst of a dispensation of comparative darkness? Has not Jesus Christ "brought life and *incorruption* to light *through the gospel*?" Besides, the meaning assigned to those terms, which are so much quoted by the upholders of the annihilationist theory, is one which they will not bear. Their system of interpretation makes sad havoc alike of Scripture and of common sense. They affirm that to "die" means to "go out of existence." Did Adam certainly "go out of existence" in the day he ate the forbidden fruit? Is that the meaning of Gen. ii. 17? Is the woman who liveth in pleasure "annihilated" (1 Tim. v. 6,) while she liveth? When Christ said, (Matt. viii. 22,) "Let the dead bury their dead," did he give the absurd command that those who have ceased to exist were to bury those who have ceased to exist? Equally erroneous is the meaning attached to the other terms on which the destructionist theory is based. Was the land of Egypt blotted out of being, when Pharaoh said, (Exodus x. 7,) that it was "destroyed" by reason of the plagues? Twice in the course of one prophetic book, (Hosea xiii. 9; iv. 6,) are God's ancient people told by Him that they were "destroyed;" and yet they had not ceased to exist, for God still continued to warn and exhort them by his prophet. So of the other terms: "the righteous perisheth," (Isaiah lvii. 1,) and "the land perisheth," (Jer. ix. 12); Jacob was "consumed" (Gen. xxxi. 40) and Christ was "eaten up" (or consumed, for the word in the original is the same,) by the zeal of God's house (Psalm lxix. 9); Enoch "was not," (Gen. v. 24); Messiah was "cut off" (Daniel ix. 16,) "was cut off out of the land of the living," (Isaiah liii. 8). Would any one be bold and blasphemous enough to assert that the words in these passages teach the extinction of the persons of whom they are predicated? Indeed we could take the book of Job alone, and on the theory of interpretation adopted by the destructionists, we could show by numerous quotations from the mouth of the old patriarch of Uz, that he ought to have been blotted out of being more than twenty times over before we reach the end of the thirtieth chapter. Ought not this fact alone to convince any one of the folly of this interpreta-

tion, and the utter fallacy and futility of the annihilationist arguments?

We cannot close without some reference to the tendencies and results of the theory we have been examining. In its fully developed form it leads to the grossest kind of materialism. Denying the immortality of the soul, it makes the body the whole of man; it tells the Christian mother that the infant whom God took, and whom she expects to meet again, will have no future existence; it says to those who are mourning the loss of loved ones who have died in the Lord, that the spirits of the departed are *not* "with Christ, which is far better," that to be "absent from the body" is *not* to be "present with the Lord," and that the souls of believers do *not* immediately pass into paradise, but are consigned to a condition of unconscious slumber. With such a prospect before him, instead of being "gain" for the Christian to die, it would be loss, immediate and immense. Oh, it is a dreary, dismal creed, against which I would most solemnly warn you. It cannot be found in the Bible, and no Christian Church of any name has ever held it. We learn from history that for the first three centuries of the Christian era, it was never once heard of, till a rhetorician named Arnobius began to teach it. Of this man the Church historian, Mosheim, says that he was "superficial in his knowledge of Christian doctrines, and commingled great errors with important truths." That is still the characteristic of those who uphold the annihilation dogma. When will men learn that their own speculations are unprofitable, and that it is best for them to abide by the "law and the testimony?"

Over thirty years ago a good but erratic man, called William Miller, aroused public attention in some parts of the United States and Canada to the subject of Christ's speedy coming and personal reign. He ventured to fix the precise date of the advent, and when the day passed and the Bridegroom still tarried, hundreds of his followers, disappointed in their hopes, fell back into avowed infidelity. Hundreds more, carrying out the system of interpretation adopted by Miller, reached conclusions regarding the condition of the impenitent dead similar to those we have been examining, and which their leader would have rejected as utterly unscriptural. Moreover, in its direct results this theory cannot fail to

strengthen the hands of the impenitent and encourage them in their sins. Could we assure the wicked of non-existence hereafter, many of them would adopt the old Epicurean mottoes: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," "A short life and a merry one." Could we tell the unsaved that if they do not repent and believe in Jesus, they will be blotted out of existence; would that consideration either stop them in their rebellious career, or lead them in penitence to the Saviour's feet? Assuredly not. Annihilation was the very thing they wished for, but hardly dared to believe in. The history of the French Revolution of 1799 furnishes fearful corroboration of the moral, or rather immoral, tendency of the dogma. "My abode will soon be in annihilation," said Danton, one of the chief actors in that terrible tragedy. Steeled and stupified by the thought, he condemned hundreds to the guillotine without one pang of remorse. "Death is an eternal sleep," they said in those days, and so they pursued their plunderings, and debaucheries, and massacres with infernal glee. Can we wonder at it? Did not the system produce its legitimate results? The Saviour has given us the test by which all false teachers and their doctrines are to be tried: "By their fruits ye shall know them." Materialistic and even sensual in its tendencies—we might well expect that this belief would in process of time, degrade men to the level of the beasts whose destinies they claim.

But we have already spoken too long. If you have followed our examination of the Word, you can only come to the conclusion, that when the wicked are driven away in their wickedness, they enter a condition of conscious suffering and of endless woe. Men of God strove to pluck them as "brands from the burning," but they refused their help and rushed on to ruin. As we think of what that ruin is, as we know these "terrors of the Lord," we would persuade sinners to "flee from the wrath to come." We would point them to the Lamb of God, and press for serious and saving solution the unanswered and unanswerable question: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" We would remind them of that other awful question proposed to the impenitent by the lowly and loving One of Nazareth himself: "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Oh, if the deep, dark gulf of despair have any terrors, remember

that Christ died to save from it ; and that none shall hereafter know the "outer darkness," except as they refuse the "light of life." Men may speculate as they please, but sin is an infinite evil, and demands either an infinite satisfaction or an infinite punishment. That could be no light doom which the sacrifice of God's only-begotten Son alone could avert, which Jesus wept to think of, which Jesus died to save from. Ponder well, dear unsaved hearers, these words of the Saviour :—"everlasting punishment," "eternal damnation," "undying worm," "unquenchable fire." They breathe a terrible meaning and point to a tremendous reality. They should settle the matter. O flee from the wrath to come. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him ;"—Mark the language "*abideth* on him,"

"While life, or thought, or being lasts,
Or immortality endures."

The Lord lead us all to "Jesus, who delivereth from the wrath to come."—Amen.



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